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## Actual wolf weights often skimpier than hunters estimate

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Rumors of 150-pound wolves abound in the Idaho Panhandle, but most of the wolves taken by hunters are much smaller.

Adult females averaged 86 pounds, according to Idaho Department of Fish and Game officials, who also included the weights of wolves struck by vehicles in the survey. For adult males, 101 pounds was the average.

The exception was a 130-pound adult male killed in Boundary County that was weighed after its stomach had been removed.


It's not surprising that wolf weights get exaggerated, said Jim Hayden, Fish and Game's regional wildlife manager in Coeur d'Alene.

"They look huge," he said. "They've got long legs, big heads and lots of fur."

Wolves have 2- to 4-inch-long guard hairs around their necks, reinforcing the impression of a bulky body, said Jason Husseman, a Fish and Game wolf biologist in Salmon, Idaho. People see wolves, compare them to their dogs, and estimate that the wolves weigh 150 pounds.

"It's a human tendency to overestimate. You see the same thing with bear sightings," Husseman said.

In actuality, wolves have the lean, rangy build of distance runners – an adaption that helps them chase down prey, he said.



Some opponents of wolf reintroduction claim that the Canadian gray wolves released in Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho in the mid-1990s are a larger, more aggressive subspecies than native wolves, which were extinct by the 1930s. Biologists say there's little or no evidence to back up that assertion.

"I'm curious that they throw out those numbers – that the Canadian wolves are 50 to 100 pounds bigger than the native Idaho wolves," Husseman said. "I don't know where those numbers come from."

Hayden said the most authoritative research on wolf subspecies comes from a former U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service zoologist, Ronald Nowak, who studied 580 historic skulls of full-grown male wolves. Nowak concluded that North America had five subspecies of gray wolves. Two subspecies had historic ranges in Idaho – the Rocky Mountain wolf and the Great Plains wolf.